

METHOD AND DEVICES FOR DRY LOADING OF CHROMATOGRAPHY RESINS

The present invention relates to a chromatography column, a module comprising such a chromatography column and a method for using such a column or module.

The use of chromatography columns for the separation of individual compounds that exist in sample solution are well-known. Such columns are usually used for liquid chromatography. To this end, a resin is packed in an enclosure and a carrier liquid flows through the packed resin.

To load the resin in a column, one can open the column and pour in it the resin in suspension in a diluted buffer. One can also load the resin in a column via an automatic transfer pumping unit. At present, resins are loaded in columns in liquid phase. For this reason, the resins are usually stored and marketed in a buffer solution in order to avoid bacterial proliferation. After the loading, before the packing procedure, the storage buffer has to be replaced, by an appropriate buffer (phosphate buffer, chloride buffer, etc.).

Alternatively, the present invention provides a method for loading a chromatography resin into a chromatography column comprising an enclosure, a first port, to put the enclosure in communication with a tank comprising chromatography resin particles having a size distributed between a minimum size and a maximum size, and a second port, to put the enclosure in communication with a pump, wherein the first port forms a passage having a minimum section which is at least 10 000 times as large as a particle section corresponding to the maximum size particles.

Such a method allows the use of a dry resin. A dry resin can be carried in sealed bags. Such bags can be sterilized, for instance with gamma rays.

Thus, resins can be conditioned without

antibacterial buffer. Consequently, the resin conditioning is easier than with the prior art methods.

With the loading method according to the invention, there is no need to condition the resin in a liquid phase.
5 Thus, the storage volume and weight are lesser than with the prior art methods. The transport and storage costs are also reduced.

Further, the resin volume transferred in a column can be accurately controlled since the only resin can be
10 weighted.

Handling the resin is also easy since the overweight due to the storage buffer is suppressed. Moreover, it is not necessary to put the resin in suspension in the buffer before its transfer in a column.

15 Buffer volumes required for the packing and the unpacking of the columns are reduced. Once the dry resin has been transferred in a column, it can be dampened directly with the packing buffer, without flushing the storage buffer.

20 Consequently, further to the easy resin handling, conditioning and weighing, the loading method according to the invention allows to make the packing easier.

Embodiments of the invention may include one or more of the following features. The column comprises an
25 enclosure having a first port and a second port, and said method comprises pumping a dry chromatography resin from a resin tank into the enclosure through the first port, via a pump connected to a second port. The enclosure, when in use, extends vertically between a bottom and a top, the
30 second port being located above the first port. A pump is connected to the second port. It pumps the resin through a filter. The vacuum pressure in the enclosure is between -100 kPa and -50 kPa.

Another aspect of the invention provides a method
35 for unloading a chromatography resin mixed with a liquid,

from a chromatography column into a chromatography column comprising an enclosure, a first port, to put the enclosure in communication with a tank comprising chromatography resin particles having a size distributed between a minimum size and a maximum size, and a second port, to put the enclosure in communication with a pump, wherein the first port forms a passage having a minimum section which is at least 10 000 times as large as a particle section corresponding to the maximum size particles.

Embodiments of such an unloading method may include one or more of the following features. The column comprises an enclosure having a high port located above a low port, this method comprises successively the steps of a) pumping the liquid from the enclosure through the low port, b) drying the chromatography resin comprised in the enclosure, and c) pumping the dried resin through the low port. The vacuum pressure in the enclosure is between -100 kPa and -50 kPa. The unloading method according to the invention further comprises between steps b) and c), injecting a gas through the low port. Step b) of this method comprises injecting a hot gas through the low port in order to totally dry the resin. Step b) may also comprise injecting a hot gas through the high port. The hot gas can be steam, even if steam is not used in 100 % of the unloading cases.

Another aspect of the invention provides a chromatography column comprising an enclosure and a first port. The first port puts the enclosure in communication with a tank comprising chromatography resin particles having a size distributed between a minimum size and a maximum size (these minimum and maximum can be for example respectively 10 μm and 300 μm , but most common sizes are comprised between 40 and 80 μm ; of course the pore size of column filters is adapted to the particle size) This chromatography column also comprises a second port. The

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second port puts the enclosure in communication with a pump. Further, in this chromatography column, the first port forms a passage having a minimum section which is at least 10 000 times as large as a particle section corresponding to the maximum size particles. Of course the particle section corresponds to the maximum section of a particle.

Embodiments of this column may include one or more of the following features. The enclosure, when in use, extends vertically between a bottom and a top, the second port being located above the first port. The first port is provided with an inlet valve having a minimum section which is at least 10 000 times as large as the particle section corresponding to the maximum size particles.

Another aspect of the invention provides a chromatography column comprising

- an enclosure,
 - a first port provided with an inlet valve, to put the enclosure in communication with a tank comprising chromatography resin particles having a size distributed between a minimum size and a maximum size, and
 - a second port, to put the enclosure in communication with a pump,
- wherein the inlet valve comprises a chamber, an inlet duct and a piston,
- the chamber communicating with the enclosure through a first aperture,
 - the inlet duct communicating with the chamber through a second aperture and being adapted to be connected to the tank, and
 - the piston being movable in the chamber between a closing position, where it closes the first and second apertures, and an opening position, where it opens the first and second apertures, said piston letting free substantially all the space of the chamber between the

first and second apertures.

Embodiments of this column may include one or more of the following features. The enclosure, when in use, extends vertically between a bottom and a top, the second
5 port being located above the first port.

The valve defines a passage between a pipe adapted to be connected to the duct and the enclosure, the smallest section of this passage through the valve corresponding to the section of one of the first and second
10 apertures. The minimum section of the passage is at least 10 000 times as large as the particle section corresponding to the maximum size particles. The piston has an end surface with a tapered shape, said end surface having a portion which is flush with the internal surface of the
15 enclosure, when in closing position. The first port forms a passage having a minimum section corresponding to at least a minimum internal diameter of 20 mm.

Another aspect of the invention provides a module for loading chromatography resin into a chromatography
20 column. Such a module comprises a chromatography column according to the invention and the pump connected to the second port of the chromatography column, through a pipe.

In an embodiment of this module, it may include a tank for chromatography resin, this tank being connected to
25 the first port.

Figure 1 shows an embodiment of a module of the present invention.

Figure 2 is a vertical section of the chromatography column of the module shown in figure 1.

30 Figures 3a and 3b are schematic vertical sections of an example of a valve for the column shown on figures 1 and 2, respectively in an opening position and a closing position.

Figure 4 is a schematic diagram of a module
35 embodiment according to the invention.

Figure 5 is a schematic diagram of another module embodiment according to the invention.

Figure 1 shows a first embodiment of the invention. According to this embodiment, the invention comprises a module 1 for loading a dry chromatography resin into a chromatography column. This module 1 comprises a chromatography column 3, a pump 5 and a resin tank 7.

The pump 5 is for instance a pump referenced C 21 04-200, marketed by PIAB USA, Inc. Such a pump can be controlled in order to have a vacuum in the chromatography column comprised about -75kPa, with a flow rate of 2.5 m³/mn. This pump is supplied with silicone sealings and filters in accordance with FDA requirements. The filters are for instance GoreTM SinbranTM filters recommended for powders with particle size at least equal to 0.5 μm (depending on the powder properties). GoreTM SinbranTM filters can be sterilized for 30 mn at 121°C.

As shown in Figure 2, the chromatography column 3 comprises an enclosure 9 extending along a vertical axis Z between a bottom 11 and a top 13. The column 3 can be a column of the type marketed by Bio-Rad Laboratories Inc. by the EasyPackTM and GelTecTM trademarks (of Verdot Industrie).

The enclosure 9 consists of a first cylinder and a second cylinder, each having a longitudinal axis corresponding to the vertical axis Z. The first cylinder defines a separation chamber 15. The second cylinder defines a cleaning chamber 17. The second cylinder has a larger diameter than the first cylinder. The bottom edge of the separation chamber 15 is attached to the top edge of the cleaning chamber 17 by means of an annular plate 19. A bottom base plate 21 is attached to the bottom edge of the cleaning chamber 17. A top base plate 23 is attached to the top edge of the separation chamber 15.

A packing piston 25 moves in the separation chamber

15. The packing piston 25 comprises a distributor plate 27 and a frit 29 adapted to retain the resin in the separation chamber 15. For example, the frit 29 is pressed stainless steel or polypropylene with a 20 μm porosity. The
5 combination of the distributor plate 27 and frit 29 ensures optimal uniform plug flow at all flow rates.

A bottom unpacking piston 31 is displaceable between an opened position, in which the separation chamber 15 opens into the cleaning chamber 17 to allow emptying the
10 separation chamber 15 (as shown in Figure 2), and a closed position in which the separation chamber 15 is isolated from the cleaning chamber 17 (not shown).

The enclosure 9 is provided with at least three ports 33, 35, 37 :

- 15 - a first port 33 allows connection to the separation chamber 15 through the annular plate 19;
- a second port, or high port, 35 allows connection to the separation chamber 15 through the packing piston 25; and
- 20 - a low port 37 allows connection to the cleaning chamber 17 through the bottom base plate 21.

Another port 34 symmetrical to the first port relatively to the vertical axis Z is possibly provided. This other port 34 allows connection to the separation
25 chamber 15 through the annular plate 19 too.

The first port 33 is provided with an inlet valve 39. The inlet valve 39 allows putting the enclosure in communication with the tank 7.

The other port 34, when existing, is provided with
30 an outlet valve similar to the inlet valve 39.

The second port is connected to the pump 5 through a pipe 40 (see Figure 1).

The low port 37 can also be connected to a pump (not shown in Figures 1 and 2)

35 As shown in Figure 3a, the inlet valve 39 comprises

a chamber 41, an inlet duct 43 and a piston 45. The chamber 41 communicates with the separation chamber 15 through a first aperture 47 in the annular plate 19. The inlet duct communicates with the chamber 41 through a second aperture 49. The inlet duct 45 is adapted to be connected to the tank 7 through a flexible pipe 51 (see Figure 1). The piston 45 is movable in the chamber 41 between an opening position and a closing position. In the opening position, the piston 45 opens the first 47 and second apertures 49 (Figure 3a). In the closing position the piston 45 closes the first 47 and second 49 apertures (Figure 3b). In the opening position, approximately all the space of the chamber 41 comprised between the first 47 and second 49 apertures, forms a free passage.

This passage allows dry chromatography resins to flow from the tank 7 to the separation chamber 15. If a resin comprises particles the size of which is distributed between a minimum size and a maximum size, the minimum section of this passage is calibrated relatively to the maximum size of the particles so as to allow a dry resin to flow through the same without any problem. For example, the minimum section of the passage is at least 10 000 times as large as the particle section of the maximum size particles. This minimum section corresponds to the section of at least one of the first 47 and second 49 apertures. For instance, this minimum section corresponds to a 20 mm internal diameter.

The piston 45 has an end surface 53 with a tapered shape in order both to allow a tight seal with the first aperture 47 and to make the flow through the valve 39 easier. Said end surface 53 is flush with the internal surface of the annular plate 19, when the piston 45 is in its closing position, in order to make the column cleaning easier.

An embodiment example of the loading method

according to the invention is described below.

According to this embodiment, a dry resin of a type 60 Silica Gel™ (a trademark of Merck kGaA.) marketed with the reference 107734 by Merck kGaA was loaded into a 180 mm
5 diameter GelTec™ column with a height of 600 mm. This resin has a pore size distribution of 5-20µm and a mean particle size of 63 to 200 µm. It is contained in a 20 l tank 7.

As shown in figure 4, the tank 7 is connected to
10 the first part 33. The sucking of the pump 5 is connected to the second port 35. The vacuum system of the pump 5 goes back to the tank 7. The low part 37 is closed. An inflatable seal that serves as seal between the packing piston and the inner surface of the separation chamber 15
15 is inflated to 6 bars.

At a depression of -75 kPa in the separation chamber 15, with an inlet valve 39 of 20 mm internal diameter, the flow rate is equal to 500 Kgs of resin per hour, without any problem. The resin bed starts to build
20 itself very constantly. The accumulation of dry resin in front of the inlet valve 39 does not disturb the flow at all. After 2 mn of sucking, the all bed of the 180 mm diameter column is full of dry resin. The pump 5 is then stopped and the resin does settle down very evenly. The
25 packing process can be proceeded.

For columns of larger diameter the two ports 33, 34 can be used, one to suck in the resin and the other one to suck out the air or the two of them to suck in the resin, while the air is sucked out by the second port 35.

30 An embodiment example of the unloading method according to the invention is described below, with reference to Figure 5.

The resin is mixed with a liquid through a separation process, and then according to this embodiment,
35 the liquid is first pumped through the low port 37.

The packing piston 25 is raised. The resin is then dried injecting hot air through the low port 37. The hot air naturally rises and carries condensates.

When the resin is dry, air can be injected through
5 the first port 33 in order to make the dried resin cake collapsed.

After that, the dry resin is sucked out through the first port 33 while air is possibly injected through the low port 37 in order to create a small fluidisation above
10 the bottom unpacking piston 31.

After a complete unloading of the resin, the bottom unpacking piston 31 is lowered (dotted line) and the packing piston seal is deflated. The column can be cleaned in a conventional way before being used again.

15 As a variant, the internal diameter of the inlet valve can be of 30mm. This allows to rise the flow rate to values of about 600 to 100 Kgs per hour.

The resin can also be unloaded in a conventional way as a resin mixed with a liquid, through the low port
20 37.

Alternatively, the dry or dampened resin can be unloaded removing the bottom unpacking piston 31 and the bottom base plate 21.